

A review of Adam Fiedel's *Opera Bufo* (Otoliths, 2007)

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I was very fortunate to pick up a copy of *Opera Bufo* when I did. I went to see Andrew Lundwall and Daniela Olszewska read at Myopic books and was browsing the authors-who-have-been-here shelf before it started. I went upstairs and sat down. Andrew was late; he lives an hour or so outside of town. I started reading.

I don't know too much about opera, but I think that it would be a lovely experience in the spring, as is Adam's book, as is going to a good poetry reading, which is what I meant that I was fortunate to pick up a copy, right now, especially, when the spring is creeping in and melting up a bit of winter's hard and coldness. The book had some kind of similar effect on me, like music, as it is music, as it really is, and as it also uses as its larger metaphor.

The themes start and they start to mix. The way that they mix is the first part of the opera, a part which is sustained for a very large portion of the poem; so long, in fact, that I thought that was what the whole poem would be like. But it did change, and I very much appreciated that. I imagine that operas change partway through. I know our lives do. Adam writes, "as if you were a cup of finished ice-cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon goddess"(11). Is this a good time to mention that I told Andrew after the reading that my favorite line of his was, "I want to eat some ice cream I want to fuck my face with vanilla. Seems like it." Adam mentions right off that the rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began and this is a good example: "Rhythms become streams of possible shoe-lace, slugs of 3 a.m Scotch, lust after thy neighbor's daughter, mooning on the lawn"(7) and later "You become gum"(36).

Adam latches onto rhythms that are already at play in the world and sifts into them his mix of observation, word play, conjecture, description, subversion and other games of linguistic and logic, testing out our frames of reference. Many sentences land themselves in a music of metaphor that made me keep wanting more. In this weird time of wanting to start a book that I see wing past my window on Goodreads or having guilt about setting one aside that I've already committed to publicly, it was just an absolute joy to want to keep reading and reading until I was finished. And, though I hate to admit this for fear that it reveals something about my attention span, this is rare.

Also related to spring, I felt very fortunate to be reading about so many actions that are happening outside from section to section, so much grass and color and even running along the Schuylkill, which makes me miss Philly in the springtime, too. In terms of the balance that Adam's creating in the book from section to section, he's bringing in a real record of the outside world to pour into his metaphors. This is not only a great springtime thing to think about, but also an important poetic for getting the poet outside of themselves. It was riveting to watch Adam's real-time reactions as he wrote the world into the opera, which must ultimately be sung with a voice.

Well what do I want to say about the end of the opera. The opera begins to end and then it begins to know it is ending and then it is ending and then it ends. At one point, at the very beginning of the ending as I saw it, Adam writes, "I only knew two scales, and I played them every which way"(44) and then he writes, "I saw a thousand hues, and each was differently used" (49) and how can they both be true? Well they are in this opera. In the first statement, he admits that his initial range might seem limited, but in the next he shows that what he observes in the world is much more multiple. Although a bounded being, external experience is what, looking back to the first statement, allows him to create real complexity with his writing. A writer has only so many words but each encounter is new and provides new materials, new ideas, and new combinations of thoughts and words. There's an attention that Adam is drawing to this paradox of language that poetry permeates as he draws his opera to a close. Perhaps one of the things about opera is that it transmits a vital energy, besides its mimetic purpose as theater, large swells of sound are projected with so much skill into the confined space of the hall. Within *Opera Bufo*, there is real life stirring inside the language as it finds a climax out of the constraints of its own conjuring.

I finished *Opera Bufo* while I was getting my hair cut, another spring thing, getting rid of the heavy mess of growth on my head that had gotten out of control over the winter. Now I feel lighter. I guess that when it's time to finish a book of really fine poetry, "it is the hour of feeling, when singing must cease" (59). Adam writes, "If only I felt that life, concentrated into song, could be fruit juice for thirsty joggers. Alas, it is not so" (62). Well, maybe I'm in an especially optimistic mood right now, but I disagree.

to go back to the [home page](#)